

## The unsung heroines of the French résistance

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## *Chapter 13*

# **THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF THE FRENCH RÉSISTANCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This chapter is devoted to French Women and War. In *The Unsung Heroines of the French Résistance*, I include a review of the literature highlighting the role of women during German occupation, researched from various editions, discussions and recommendations of colleagues whose friend or relative played a part in the war effort to liberate their nation. Some French women have finally been recognized and are internationally renowned. Others are barely acknowledged, yet each and every French woman who has served in the French Résistance deserves to have her story told. The review offers an insight into the lives of these women, albeit from the perspective of an ethnographer.

## **INTRODUCTION**

No edition on the impacts of war on women would be complete without an exposé on the brave female warriors of the French Résistance during WWII. These are not the women in uniform that one sees in modern wars;

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they certainly played their part in the defence of their nation; these are the selfless and fearless women dedicated to the cause. In an attempt to document the narratives of the French women who gave their lives for the freedom of their nation, for those who were sent to Auschwitz and never returned; and for those who have returned but prefer to forget; we salute you all and give you a place in history.

When one thinks of the iconic, yet polemic images immortalized in post-WWII films of the brave young Frenchmen who risked life and limb in the defence of their nation from the Germans, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, comes immediately to mind. This novel has been commemorated in film and theatre in its numerous and glorified interpretations and in different languages, for generations of viewers globally who rarely leave the theatre dry-eyed and unmoved. Claude Lelouch's 1995 film starring the famous French actor, Jean-Paul Belmondo, is recognized as one of the finest to date. This film is a poignant and insightful adaptation of the novel that transposes Victor Hugo's themes into the twentieth century, especially France under Nazi occupation (Cliomuse, 2012). The Cliomuse.com site that has critiqued the different interpretations of this film credits this version as possessing an irresistible momentum, the new perspective treating the traditionally emotional and intellectual features - tolerance, justice, revolution, love and humanity – with respect and giving them added resonance (Cliomuse, 2012).

Cliomuse (2012) editors remind us however, of the controversial nature of the issue of the French Résistance, that loses none of its intensity seven decades later. They suggest that historians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are now debunking '*the traditional but mythical account of a brave national struggle to overcome hated Nazi oppressors*' (2012 p. 1), sentiments that are central to French identity. Recent perspectives on this issue dismiss claims that the Résistance movement was popular and widespread, discrediting the members' effectiveness in reducing the impacts of the Nazis on the French; further they are accused of being bitterly divided on political and ideological issues and constantly squabbling. The assertions that this organisation did not trust De Gaulle and was in fact preparing for '*a completely different post-war French social and political system*' are perhaps the most damaging. The fact that more recent productions about the Résistance deal with prickly issues such as collaboration, the nature of relationships with the German occupied forces, and acknowledgement of the predicament of the Jewish families, indicates that a 'warts and all' approach is being favoured by French television viewers today (Cliomuse, 2012).

James A. Warren (2015) reports on Gildea's (2015) book, *Fighters in the Shadows*, that endorses the myth as validated by the French public for decades, suggesting that the image of the French Résistance

“... has been carefully curated through a combination of French politics and pride, ever since jubilant crowds celebrated Paris's liberation in August 1944.” Robert Gildea's [book] sweeps aside the French Resistance 'of a thousand clichés,' showing that much more was at stake than freeing a single nation from Nazi tyranny” (Gildea, 2015, p. 1 Abstract).

In Warren's report, we discover Gildea's exacting interpretation of these historical events, going so far as to say that, as the French '*had been crushed militarily and psychologically by the mighty German blitzkrieg, in a mere six-week-campaign,*' that they were suffering from a case of '*collective Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*' (Warren, 2015). Even more damning is the claim that the Vichy regime of Marshall Philippe Pétain '*proactively colluded in the Holocaust ... and embraced numerous aspects of a Nazi ideology most French people - most civilized people - found utterly repulsive*' (Warren, 2015, p. 1).

In a moment of generosity, Gildea magnanimously admits that the situation changed dramatically in 1943 when Jean Moulin, de Gaulle's agent in France, brought the major organizations of the Résistance together in a cohesive fashion under the President. However, he gives little recognition in his book to the effectiveness of any of the networks and movements of the Résistance, nor gratitude for the countless lives of the fighters who died in this fight against German occupation. Even more conspicuous by its absence, Warren (2015, p. 5) notes that Gildea, perhaps begrudgingly, provides '*only passing references to the Resistance movement's contributions to the ultimate success of the D-Day landings,*' something he claimed was a letdown, as those contributions were substantial and many.

Diamond (2014) argues that in the interest of national unity, it was politically expedient for Gaullist post-war mythologists to disseminate the *Gaullist Myth*, that the Résistance was primarily French and that most French people had participated. She claims they did this to permit the country to get beyond the trauma of Vichy and collaboration. In so doing, they actually obscured the role of the numerous foreign members who fought alongside the French, including the Spanish republicans, the Polish and Romanian Jews, Italian anti-fascist and even German anti-Nazis. It appears that a great deal

depends on the perspective taken by the historians and commentators of the French Résistance.

Be that as it may, in light of the available literature on this polemic issue, providing a balanced approach to the review of our heroines of the Résistance is essential. It is worth reiterating that through the testimonies of the female participants portrayed in historical chronicles and presented here, that they devoted their life to a cause they believed in, a service taking place between 1939 and 1945. The women, standing by their men, contributed a great deal to France and no one can take this from them.

## THE WOMEN OF THE FRENCH RÉSISTANCE

### Nancy Wake

One can find literature on heroines such as Nancy Wake, the prominent and beautiful but fearless and deadly agent who fought against the Germans in the French Résistance. She became famous for her code name *White Mouse*, a woman who always managed to elude the Gestapo. However, it is not well known that she was an Australian heroine who received several prestigious international awards. Peter FitzSimons is a columnist of the Sydney Morning Herald in Sydney, and the biographer of a book that bears her name. *Nancy Wake* was published in 2001 in Australia (FitzSimons, 2001). Paying tribute to this heroine in the UK in 2016, The Guardian.com (2016) reports that Nancy was actually born in New Zealand and educated in Sydney. She made the move to Europe in her 20s where she worked as a freelance journalist. In this role, Nancy had actually interviewed Hitler in Vienna, from whence she witnessed the horrific treatment of the Jews by the Germans. It was at this point that she became an avowed opponent of the regime. Nancy Wake is praised for her enormous courage, providing an effective escape network for Allied soldiers, which she carried off brilliantly, camouflaged as a Marseille socialite (FitzSimons, 2001). Her exploits include the time she evaded the Germans on skis and her escape in a car that was pursued by an aero plane; and even extraordinarily, when she jumped from a moving train. We learn of Nancy's relocation from the UK to Marseille, France in 1939, subsequent to her marriage to a wealthy French industrialist named Henri Fiocca (Guardian.com).

Nancy lived by her scruples, swearing to do her utmost to rid Europe of Hitler's oppressive regime, declaring: *'Freedom is the only thing worth living*

*for. While I was doing that work I used to think that it didn't matter if I died, because without freedom there was no point in living'* (FitzSimons, 2001, p. inset). The French Résistance was very active in the south of France, providing the perfect location for Nancy to carry out her activities with the support of the locals. Outwitting the Gestapo is what she is renowned for, and Nancy lived up to her reputation by eluding the Germans for three years, enacting her role of the *White Mouse* admirably. She crossed over to Spain in the Pyrenees and returned to Britain, where she engaged in vital missions that backed up the D-Day landings. The heroine subsequently parachuted back into France. A fascinating insight describing her exploits is found in the following quotation: *"Over civilian clothes, silk-stockinged and high heeled, I wore overalls, carried revolvers in the pockets, and topped the lot with a bulky camel-haired coat, webbing harness, parachute and tin hat"* (Guardian.com, p. 1).

Whilst Nancy confessed to having no regrets for having killed a man with her bare hands, she would have surely been devastated, though proud and undefeated when she suffered the unbearable loss of her husband, who sacrificed his life to protect her identity. He was murdered by the Gestapo for refusing to disclose her whereabouts. Nancy's words are worthy of inclusion in our book: *'I hate wars and violence, but if they come I don't see why we women should just wave our men a proud goodbye and then knit them balaclavas'* (Guardian.com, p. 1). This represents the epitome of the courage and resilience exhibited by the women of the Résistance. The Guardian.com reports that it was not all smooth sailing for Nancy, whose conflicts with the Australian government cast a shadow over the brilliance of her career in the role of Résistance fighter. Choosing to reside in London and effectively refusing the belated honor from the Australians for the role she had played, lends testimony to her spirited determination not to relinquish her hard-fought medals to the Australian Museum in Canberra. She had instead sold them for a handsome fee to fund her residence in Mayfair, London instead of allowing the Australians to get their hands on them.

## Andrée Peel

In this chapter, we continue to pay tribute to the highly decorated French heroines such as Andrée Peel, née Viro, who married an English student from Bristol, UK after the war. Initially codenamed *Agent X* and then *Agent Rose*, Andrée passed away aged 105 in 2010 in the UK. This lady, who saved the lives of more than 100 Allied British and American pilots, was arrested,

interrogated by the Gestapo and tortured; yet, she miraculously survived a Nazi death squad. Her autobiography, published in 1999, is entitled *Miracles Do Happen* (Peel, 1999), a clear testimony to the incredible courage and selflessness that women such as her embodied. Her pride at having contributed to the defense and freedom of future generations was palpable when she became a much decorated heroine of the Résistance, awarded prestigious medals in recognition of her effort, not least of which was France's highest award for bravery, the *Légion d'Honneur* (Telegraph, 2010).

Goldstein's (2010) tribute in the New York Times has highlighted the courage and sacrifices that Andrée made in the role of Résistance activist in France, recounting the dangerous undertakings that she engaged in since the spring of 1940, when the German troops occupied Brest, in Brittany, France. Daughter of a civil engineer, Andrée was, at the time, running a beauty salon in Brest, where she was born. Under her assumed code-names, she became a key figure in the Résistance movement for three years. In that role, she circulated an underground newspaper, provided much needed information for the Allies on German logistics and activities and kept the Allies informed of the bombing carried out in the region. In addition to this, she was involved with the secret landings of British planes that carried intelligence agents, she and her team utilizing torch lights to ensure their safe touchdown.

In this report, Goldstein (2010) writes that her most notable achievement, according to Andrée herself, was the part she played in the rescue of 102 Allied airmen, orchestrated through a network of safe houses for fliers fleeing the Germans. She would subsequently take them to secluded Brest beaches where they could embark on boats that took them to England.

The Germans finally discovered her active role in the Résistance when she was first denounced by a comrade forced to watch his family being tortured. Her escape to Paris lasted but one week when another comrade, turned informant under torture, revealed her new identity, just after the D-Day invasion in June of 1944. The Gestapo finally arrested her, taking her to their headquarters. It is reported that "*she was stripped naked, interrogated and subjected to a series of tortures, including simulated drowning and being savagely beaten around the throat. As a result her gullet was displaced and her tonsils crushed*" (Telegraph, 2010, p. 1). She was then unceremoniously dispatched to the Ravensbrück and Buchenwald concentration camps, the final destination of most of the captured women of the Résistance. Andrée escaped the firing squad at Buchenwald thanks to the Americans who arrived just in time to liberate this camp in 1945. Her ordeal at the hands of the Gestapo has

left indelible marks on her as she is quoted to have said: “*I suffer still from that. I still have the pain*” (Goldstein, 2010, p. 1).

Hannah Diamond, Reader and Researcher at the Universities of Bath and Cardiff, in the UK, has published in a global online Journal, *The Conversation, France*, an inspiring tribute to these forgotten heroines of France, outlining one of the reasons for this anomaly:

“Women’s low visibility in French society paradoxically played to their advantage under occupation; it meant they could act as ideal couriers, with no-one, least of all the Germans, suspecting them of carrying important messages, concealing arms and papers in children’s prams, or conveying vital supplies to Resistance members in hiding ... But that same inconspicuousness meant the women of the Resistance were overlooked after the war. Women’s main priority in the immediate post-war years was elsewhere, as they focused on rebuilding family life in an effort to return to normality. They dutifully answered de Gaulle’s call for “12 m bouncing babies” [in 10 years] to rebuild France” (Diamond, 2014, p. 1).

Diamond explains that these women often demurred to their male counterparts who took full credit for the achievements of the Free French or Résistance movement in France. This is not surprising when one finds comments such as “Oversize egos were one of the few things not in short supply in the Resistance movement” (Warren, 2015, p. 4). Diamond argues that of 1,036 of its members, only six women were honored by Charles de Gaulle in the Order of Liberation. It is only recently, in 2014 she claims, the role women played during the occupation was brought into the limelight, with a debate taking place in the French Sénat. More significantly, Président Hollande bestowed the prestigious national honor on Germaine Tillion and Geneviève de Gaulle, two distinguished Résistance heroines whose ashes were entombed at the Panthéon. Apart from Marie Curie, no other French women’s ashes grace these hallowed halls (Diamond, 2014, p. 1).

Diamond (2014) describes France as a predominantly female territory during the occupation, 1940 to 1945, women who also fought against the indigenous Vichy, or collaboration government. They were, after all, the ones who endured the hardships on a daily basis as the able-bodied males were mostly held in concentration camps or had been forced to work in German factories in aid of the Third Reich’s war effort. They were only released in 1945. Many of the women played a significant role in the Résistance



movement, participating part-time and full time at all levels even if only in a few notable cases, some took part in armed combat, the traditional preserve of the males; women such as Julia Pirotte, a Belgian woman of Polish Jewish origin, Marie-Madelaine Fourcade and Lucie Aubrac (Diamond, 2014; Schwartz, 2002). Apart from the role of sabotage that the resisters were reputed for, under assumed new identities, they served as couriers, safe-house keepers, provided food and shelter and provisions to other resisters, transported arms to other fighters, produced and distributed newspapers. They were given the name of *liaison agent*. These activities came at an enormous price. Many were arrested, tortured and imprisoned and generally deported to the Female concentration camp of Ravensbruck, east of Berlin, as political prisoners. Schwartz writes that those of Jewish heritage were sent straight to Auschwitz in eastern Poland. For these reasons and more, women now hold an important place in the collective memory of the French Résistance. Diamond (2014) claims however, that whilst heroic martyrs such as Danielle Casanova and Berty Albrecht now personify the Résistance legacy *au féminin*, for communists and Gaullists, respectively, little scholarly attention is paid to these brave women.

Finally, in 1944, a significant improvement for women was established thanks to the Suffragette movement that lobbied and won the vote for women. Diamond (2014) argues that the Occupation proved to be an apprenticeship for them, as they gained insights into their capabilities and extraordinary potential. Not that they chose to pursue these in great numbers, she adds. Still, we can consider the benefits of this shift in society as paving the way for future talented French women who have taken their place in government and higher echelons of French society today. Christine Lagarde is but one example, as this impressive French woman has held the prestigious position of Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since July, 2011.

Bernadette Gotti's (2014) comprehensive book, illustrated with photographs and replete with authentic documentation obtained from creditable sources, is a moving tribute to those who went above and beyond the call of duty to liberate France. A precious copy of Gotti's book, *39/45 Des Lorrains se souviennent*, (39/45 The people of Lorraine remember), featuring the histories of local heroes in the Lorraine province in France, was personally entrusted to me so that some of these amazing women could be honored in our book. Lest we forget! Gotti gathered the testimonies of the septuagenarians, octogenarians and nonagenarians of her region, the Lorraine, providing us with previously unedited, unpublished facts about France under German Occupation. I have selected two of the ladies whose stories moved me and I

believe give us an insight into the sacrifices made and the dangers these courageous individuals faced on a daily basis.

Françoise Berger and Isabelle Pasant, both operating under assumed names during the occupation, have been dutifully recognized and lauded in Bernadette Gotti's (2014, p. 119) book. Their stories have been selected from Gotti's chronicles. Berger, also known as Francette Thessandier, was awarded the *Grand Officier of the Légion d'Honneur* (Grand Officer of The Legion of Honour). Francette, as she was known, together with her husband Roland, dedicated her life to the Résistance. Working in the family bookshop in Nancy, this position afforded her the anonymity required to supply crucial information to her superiors in the French Underground Organization, the *Maquisards of the Lorraine Résistance*, as the regional division of fighters was called. From this unsuspecting post, apart from hiding those who were fleeing for their lives, she carried out her duties in the role of an agent, Liaison of the network *Noyautage des Administrations Publiques*, (NAP) - an arm of the Résistance created by André Plaisantin in the Combat movement to infiltrate the Administrative sectors of the French State (Cousin, 2014). The main mission of this branch was to generally inform the Free France and the Security section of the Resistance; engage in professional sabotage; provide false papers; and prepare for taking power when liberation came (Gotti, 2014). Francette was denounced on June 8, 1944 for her involvement in the Résistance, by someone she knew from Nancy, but for reasons she does not explain, she declined to reveal his name.

This is where her journey of horror began. Francette's story is predicated on a chronicle of events recorded in her own words as well as Gotti's commentaries gleaned from the personal interviews with Francette. This brave woman was interrogated by the Gestapo at the prison of Nancy where she was detained until deportation. Unfortunately, for reasons that we are not aware of, there is no further elaboration of her ordeal during her interrogation by the Germans. Her story is tragically representative of the *modus operandi* of the Gestapo during the war. All of the female detainees accused of involvement in the Résistance were transported from one concentration camp to another in cattle wagons. Arriving in Malkleeberg-Leipzig on February 10, 1945, a whole group of women of the Résistance had their heads shaven and was forced into excavation work, digging trenches for 12 hours a day. These women were starved and when they escaped surveillance, they survived on frostbitten beets pulled from the ground. Her greatest obsession, indeed, fear was to be caged and fired upon by a machine gun.

On April 13, 1944, Francette and her group were forced to head towards Czechoslovakia, on foot! After several days, she decided to enlist the help of a friend, Henriette Arbelin, to escape in the hope of joining the Allied Forces. This was not an easy feat, as the conspicuous shaven heads made them easy to detect. Other compounding factors hampering their successful flight were their registration numbers and red triangles on the front and on the back of their shirts, the St Andrew cross. Their column had been bombarded several times and each time a friend was injured or stopped, she was slaughtered by the SS militia. Francette and her companion had taken advantage of a scramble during a bombardment to make their escape to Freital on April 22. The women hid in the forest where they attempted to remove the offensive signs on their clothes that made them stand out. They had taken rags to hide their scalp and managed to survive on sugar beets and grass. To make matters worse, their lack of proficiency in German was a serious impediment; the danger was even greater as the Volkstürms, whose ill repute equalled that of the SS, would slaughter anyone who could not present the correct papers. Their salvation finally came on May 8, 1944, when they encountered firstly, the vanguards of the Russian Army, the division at the head of the troops that gave them much needed supplies. Subsequently, as they continued to walk, on May 12, Francette and Henriette found a contingent of American soldiers who gave them some assistance. They finally made their way back to Strasbourg on May 18.

Gotti's (2014, p. 121) interviews reveal something that Francette had not included in her memoirs; the frequency of nightmares that continued to haunt her, thirty years later. She also spoke of hunger. In addition to this and perhaps the most shocking, were the hallucinations that she experienced: from one of the concentration camps, she witnessed huge trays, heaped with golden roasted chickens, piping hot, rising towards the sky from the crematorium chimneys! '*Je les vois encore!*' (I still see them!), she confessed to Gotti. Francette's husband Roland, who was also an active member of the Résistance was caught but managed to escape from Dachau. This couple's continued, active involvement in the post-war effort, through various associations that assist the deported members, has left a lasting legacy on their daughter, Anne, who suddenly realized that: '*Avec le recul, je me rends compte que je n'ai pas eu une enfance normale?*' (In hindsight, I realize that I have never had a 'normal' childhood!). Anne acknowledges having spent her entire time at conferences, inaugurations, awards for decorated members, speeches and commemorations, and that her childhood and adolescent years had passed her by; in addition to this, the constant visits to their home, of former Résistance fighters and deported individuals; the outcome was unmistakable. It was apparently not

until Anne started work that she discovered another World! This is testament to the inter-generational legacies of war. *C'est la guerre! C'est la vie!* (Such is war! Such is life!).

Gotti (2014, p. 123) concludes this chapter on Francette, Roland and their daughter, Anne with a touching entry from Dr Leon Boutbien (a comrade of Roland's from the Struthof and Dachau):

At last! They are approaching! It is them! Finally!  
Day is dawning! Royally! The mountains are hidden by the mist.  
They enter the camps whilst chewing gum, coming from another  
world.  
Unawares .... I raised my head,  
The trees have blossomed,  
For the first time in thirty months,  
I cried (Translation, Patron, M. 2016)

Isabelle Mangin, née Pasant, also known as Dominique Gaillard in the Résistance, was the recipient of six prestigious Crosses and Medals, among them, *Chevalier de L'Ordre National du Mérite* (Knight of the National Order of Merit), *Croix du Combattant Volontaire de la Résistance* (The Volunteer Résistance Fighter Cross) and *Médaille D'Or des Traducteurs Jurés* (Gold Medal for Sworn Translators); the latter for her role of trilingual interpreter for United States Army General George Smith Patton from 1944-1945. Patton was responsible for the liberation of France in 1944 from Nazi occupation in the Moselle region. Gotti's (2014) report exudes national pride and deference before this 98 year old heroine who preferred to dismiss with the courtesies, and be called *Matou* in lieu of Madame during the interviews. Isabelle, born on December 3, 1918 in the Moselle region, had an eventful life to say the least, narrowly escaping arrest several times by the Nazis. Blessed with a happy and comfortable childhood until the age of 16, she grew up in an international setting until the results of a referendum that saw the Franco-German association established, fraudulently, she notes. Pierre Laval, Phillip Pétain's minister had allowed this decision to pass. The result was catastrophic for the Sarre region as the Germans troops moved in and Hitler expelled all of the foreigners. Both Marshal Pétain, once a national hero in France, thanks to his defence of Verdun in WWI, and Laval, a French politician and statesman in his administration during WWII, were subsequently discredited and executed as leaders of the French collaborationist government with Germany at Vichy (Cavendish, 2001).

Forced to move to Nancy, Isabelle's experience at school was characterized by draconian exigencies that spilled out into the community where daily life was defined by: '*Cela ne se fait pas!*' (That is just not done!). Nothing was allowed! Running in the corridors, wearing incorrect uniforms, eating ice cream in the street! Fortunately, in Sarre, their maid was German, a distinct advantage that contributed to her fluency in the language. She also acquired English through studies in a Jewish college whilst on an extended second trip to England where she volunteered her services to the Town Hall to assist in the war effort in 1939. War had been declared and Isabelle was repatriated by the British when the college was requisitioned. Resuming her studies at the University of Nancy, for a year she had no contact with her fiancé, Francy who had been mobilized. When the Nazis arrived, Gotti writes that Isabelle could not face submission to them once again. With assistance from her fiancé's family, she left for Toulouse where locals in Jussey were welcoming and willing to assist. The horrors she witnessed were soul-destroying as the Germans took prisoners and gunned down 'colored' French prisoners. Defying the rules forbidding civilians to circulate in the town, she hid from the Germans. Isabelle's words need no clarification: '*J'ai vu! Je n'ai pas pu pleurer*' (Gotti, 2014, p. 129). (I saw! I was not able to cry!). She proceeded to cut the German telephone line and decided to wage war on the Nazis.

Once back in Nancy, Isabelle dedicated her life to the Résistance movement with the help of trusted members of the local division and former lecturers. Her efforts in this organization were admirable and before long she was forced to 'disappear' as her effectiveness and daring exploits had put her on the Nazi radar, along with other Anglophones and English students. The risks she took had paid off until Isabelle was forced to flee. Upon her return home, Isabelle was approached by the *AOB, Bureau des Opérations Aériens – Messages et Parachutage* (Bureau of Aerial Operations – Messages and Parachuting) who recruited her for encryption of texts. It was then that she assumed the name of Dominique Gaillard. Given prior warning that the Germans were coming, she took her transmitter box to the Headmistress of the institute where she was teaching. The principal, who was already committed to the cause as she was hiding a young Jewish lass, smiled and turned the box into a footrest under her desk, no questions asked!

Isabelle recounts that, after a gruelling process of recruitment, she was enlisted as translator and interpreter by Phillip Gensler at the Head Office of General Patton after the Allied Invasion of Normandy in 1944. The personnel were there to cater to the Americans' demands for everything, from problem

solving to requisitioning but Patton's reputation had preceded him. An irreverent, vulgar, bellicose and bombastic character, his image was more than colorful. He was accused of making racist and anti-Semitic comments but he had still earned the respect of those who served under him. Isabelle, spirited and audacious, had caught the attention of the General who could not believe the gumption of *'cette gamine qui ose'* (this daring young kid) who had found the nerve to speak up to him whilst he ranted, pounding his fist on the table because his staff had failed to find shelter for his trucks: *'Bon Dieu de Bon Dieu, réquisitionnez! Réquisitionnez!'* (For God's sake, requisition! Requisition!) (Gotti, 2014, p. 131). Isabel vividly describes how, facing the General, who was dumbfounded by her disruption, she stood up, only just reaching 152cm in height, and imitated the General as she thumped her fist on the table. She berated him for the bad reputation he was acquiring through his attitude and manner because the French locals were sick and tired of hearing, after four years, 'Requisition! Requisition!' by the enemy who were just as demanding. Her final words struck a chord: *'C'était des amis qu'on attendait, pas des conquérants!'* (We were expecting friends, not conquerors!) (2014, p. 131).

Rising to the challenge, Patton ordered her to locate suitable premises for his trucks, giving her one hour! Being a local, she delivered on her promises and when the General turned up late asking if she had found something, she responded in the affirmative, telling him that she had been waiting three hours for him to return. Elated by this spirited girl who was a proverbial rainmaker, he gave her an approbatory slap on the shoulders and with a smile, said 'Good Girl!' Isabelle was thus 'adopted' in the role of recruiter, her trilingual (French, English, German) expertise highly sought after (2014, p. 132).

Isabelle relates an anecdote where Patton continuously interrupted her whilst she was interpreting, asking *'What did he say, What did he say?'* to which she accordingly asked him to keep quiet if he wanted her to translate correctly. During renewed hostilities, Patton agreed to her request to join the Résistance fighters once again, and after meeting her parents, promised them that he would protect her as he would his own daughter. This was to be for the duration of the war but Isabelle managed to obtain approval of dispensation if her fiancé returned to France before the end of the war. This was another promise he kept as, after five years without seeing each other, Isabelle, escorted under Patton's command, was reunited with Francy. Francy, who had been located at the prison camp of Luckenwalde, east of Berlin was in very poor shape, having escaped several times and been recaptured. In one of the

horrific incidents in prison, he had been forced to walk barefoot on red hot coals, from which he never recovered.

This ends the insight into the lives of some of the heroines of the French Résistance. Our sincere appreciations go to French author, Bernadette Gotti from the region of Lorraine, who, thanks to the authentic portrayal of the testimonies of the brave men, women, survivors and families of the 'disappeared', they have finally found their place in the Annals of French Literature. '*Pour que tout ne tombe pas dans l'oubli*' (Lest we forget!) (Gotti, 2014, p. 5).

## COMMENTARY

This book is devoted to tell the stories, usually in first person, of women and their experiences in war. This chapter reviews the role of French women in the war of all wars, the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Today, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we hear more frequently of women who take part in all sorts of fighting, from active duty in the army, to women who blow themselves up, supposedly in order to bring peace and end the war. This chapter hails French women who have gone almost unnoticed by the media and the public. In the pre- women's liberation era, they shared the burden of fighting, of resisting an oppressive regime, and the fight for victory and eventual peace. It is a chapter that highlights the great sacrifice, the abilities, the talented participation, the strength of will and character, and the [almost] equal place of women in fighting the Nazis during WWII. The chapter describes but a handful of women, noting that there are more courageous, creative, strong, and committed women, in the French Résistance as well as everywhere else. It describes a horrific time in human history, but does so with optimism and appreciation of what women can and do in days of war, and naturally in days of peace.

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